

Phenomenological analysis of an art academy and a medieval monastery

SoSe 2022 // Mittelalter Vorlesung
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Der Fakultät I Bildende Kunst
4 Semester
Martikeldnummer 2917
HfBK Dresden

15.08.2022

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Since I started writing my Hausarbeit after lectures on the Middle Ages, without attending a seminar, the topic of my work is free in nature, based on my interests. Namely, it was interesting for me to consider the structure of a medieval monastery and compare it with a modern art academy. It seemed to me that these are similar institutions that are engaged in the preservation, transfer of knowledge and building complex internal communication.

I'll start with a utopian academy idea that my colleague, Anton Krivula, and I had two years ago. We felt the need for such an institution in our own practice. Our concern in the academy as an organic institution began with the construction of a utopia. It so happened that soon our artistic work was transformed and took on the form of institutional research and institutional reframing, seeking the room to institutionalize autonomous, and unproductive art practices; to legalize the artist's invisible work outside of flat social functions: thus, looking out for a transient space for defending the place of art for the future.

I quote only an excerpt from the text *Why not the Academy*, the full version will be an appendix to this work. 'The Academy turns out to be one of the few institutions capable of resisting bad weather, wind changes, icing, and warming. If the policy of any museum can sooner or later be declared irrelevant, or questioned, then the Academy, due to the fluidity of its content (after all, it is always just an empty frame) remains invulnerable even during an incredibly severe drought. The Academy is a network institution with a sustained history of more than two thousand years. To look into its emptiness means almost stopping time.

Precisely because the object of this empty frame could be whatever, the academy can be a condition for autonomous artistic practice, independent neither from collectors of things nor from funds of political parties. In addition, being a place, the academy gives people the unique opportunity to attend to the living work of the artist¹. The Academy is not so much a pedagogical institution but a place where the artist meets society.

¹ There was an attempt to implement this function in the Art-residency format, but it is definitely far from being able to replace the academy.

If we consider the Academy from the perspective of our institutional utopia its mission would be in defending the autonomy of artistic practices and procuring such a social function as a place to witness the emergence of art.

World, real (not virtual), network institution that provides the social framework for artist's autonomous practice by its structure and instruments: **why not the Academy?**²

The Academy is a place and time, protection and leisure (σχολή), communication and discourse. How does this relate to the monastery? What has that to do with the monastery? When I started studying and reading about monasteries, I realized that it would not be easy to make an analysis and compare it with an art academy, because there is no one particular model of a monastery that would be repeated in all others. The structures of the monasteries are distincted. I learned about the difference between a monastery and cenobitic monasticism. Cenobitic monasticism ("cenobitic" are derived from the Greek words *koinos* (κοινός), "common", and *bios* (βίος), "life") differs from the monastery in that the monks there, although they spend part of the day together, each live separately, in a small hut, and spend part of the day alone. Cenobitic monasticism is only a preparation for those who can then move on to a higher ascetic level. That is, all Christian monasticism arose in the Egyptian and Syrian deserts. In the III century, some believers, in order to hide from the world with its temptations and devote themselves entirely to prayer, began to leave pagan cities for deserted places. The first hermits who practiced extreme asceticism lived either alone or with several students/scholars, forming cenobitic monasticism. An example of one of the first cenobitic monasticism was established in the 4th century by Pachomius the Great from the Egyptian city of Thebes, he wrote an order that described how monks should live and pray. Later, monasteries in a more sociable role began to form in the west of the Roman world - in Gaul and Italy, then in Ireland. Unlike the hermits, the monks, friars and brothers of monasteries united under the authority of an abbot and lived according to an order created by one of the fathers. Or of the abbess, if we talking about sisters and nuns. There were very severe, ascetic traditions of monasticism, for example, in Ireland due to the efforts of

² Krivula, Anton / Krasina, Marika: Why not the academy?, essay, self-published online, 2020.

St. Patrick, or in many Egyptian monasteries, and the traditions that did not require radical asceticism and a constant battle with one's own flesh, like the Benedictine Rule, a book of precepts written in Latin in 516 by St Benedict of Nursia for the abbey of Montecassino which he founded between Naples and Rome.³

The first similarity between the art academy and monastic life can be seen precisely in the order. There are a large number of dissimilar art academies in different countries, with different programs, with various structures of study, and even the number of years of study can vary. No academy is like the other: the 17th-century Academy in Paris is very different from the Dresden Art Academy of the 21st century.

1. Life as art

'The problem with monasticism is how to base and establish yourself as an organized and well-governed community.'⁴

A monastery is a community of those who voluntarily put themselves under the authority of an abbot in order to go together to salvation. All the members, regardless of age, act as spiritual sons of the father superior. Or as sisters and nuns of mother superior. Among the members of the monasteries, there are monks, friars, brothers, and nuns, also there are major ones, there are privileged ones, and there are minor of the "second class". And such a strict division according to ranks is typical not only within the monastery but as a whole at that time. 'The idea of class division of society permeates all theological and political reasoning in the Middle Ages. And the matter is not at all limited to the usual triad: the clergy, the aristocracy and the third estate. The concept of estate is not only given great value, it is also much more extensive in meaning. In general, any association, any occupation, any profession is considered as an estate. For estate is a *state*, *estat*, *ordo* (order), and behind these terms is the idea of a God-established essence.'⁵

³ Some information was taken from online publication of Arzamas Academy: <https://arzamas.academy/mag/577-abbat>

⁴ Agamben, G.: *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, Publishing House of the Gaidar Institute; Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, St. Petersburg State University, 2020, p.20

⁵ Huizinga, J.: *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Ivan Limbakh Publishing House, St. Petersburg, 2011, p. 102

Interestingly, Adalbert de Vogüé writes that monastic life and discipline in general is defined as the study and exercise of the *ars sancta*, that the abbot, who has to look after his brothers, is also the *artifex* of the art. Having enumerated all the spiritual precepts which the abbot is to teach, The Master's Rule concludes, 'This is a sacred art that we should practice with the help of spiritual tools.' (*ecce haec est ars sancta, quam ferramentis debemus spiritalibus operari*).⁶ The monastery is defined as *officina divinae artis*: 'The monastery is a workshop where the tools of the heart are stored, which are in the confinement of the body, with which one can perform the work of divine art.'⁷

'The rules to be followed by a monk are more like the rules of some art than a legal dispositive.'⁸ And so the abbot - *artifex, magister*, master of a certain *ars*, in the art academy has his own example in the role of professor of a certain Fach-Richtung: Professor of painting class or interdisciplinary and experimental painting, or the Sculpture and Architecture-Related Media class, Three-Dimensional Design or Cross-Artwork, or Professor of the Digital and Time-Based Media class. It is clear that there was only one abbot in the monastery, but for the art academy I take this as an example of a certain school, direction of study.

In addition, each monastery is also a complex administrative and economic mechanism. In order for it to work, so that the brothers, as far as possible, followed the rules, the abbot entrusted many of them with various permanent obedience. The list of such positions, of course, varied from abbey to abbey, but in most large monasteries a Librarian, Prior, Cantor, Sacristy, Refectory, Infirmarius, Porter, etc. were required. What is easy to parallel to the structure of the art academy: **Prior** is an assistant to the abbot, in our example it can be the Tutor of the professor, in fact, his deputy, who in his absence managed the brothers, the class.

Sacristy was responsible for the sacristy (*sacristia* - from the Latin *sacrum*, 'sacred utensils'), where liturgical vessels, books and vestments, as well as relics were stored,

⁶ Vogüé *La règle du maître*, I, p.372

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 380

⁸ Agamben, G.: *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, Publishing House of the Gaidar Institute; Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, St. Petersburg State University, 2020, p.41

in the academy it can be compared with the Hausmeister function.

Hospitalarius or **Eleemosynarius** at the academy could be, for example, the PR department of the academy or various Referate, the school administration.

Who could be **Cellarius** at the academy – the housekeeper, the "supply manager" of the monastery, responsible for the material well-being and subsistence of the brothers? Possibly Stura, Studierendenrat, Personalrat.

Armarius is an ordinary librarian, who is also available at the academy. In some monasteries the librarian also served as Cantor, but in the case of the Academy I will single out the Cantor as a separate position.

The **Cantor** serves as the lead singer and usually a teacher in the church with duties for a choir or worship group, as well as rehearsals. In his function he is more like the Chancellor of the academy or the Rector than the librarian.

'In this sense, the monastery was perhaps the first place where life itself – and not just the ascetic techniques that shape and regulate it – appeared as art. However, this analogy should not be understood in the sense of an aestheticization of existence, but rather in the sense that Michel Foucault probably had in mind in his last texts, as the definition of one's own life as connected with continuous practice.'⁹

2. The birth of a rule

Another interesting comparison can be made along the time axis. What is time for a man of the Middle Ages? It's hard to imagine anyone thinking about time the way we do now. No one in the Middle Ages (at least until the 14th-15th centuries) was so preoccupied with time and so in need of tools to measure it as the members of the monastery. And what does it mean to count the time before the advent of mechanical watches? The discipline designed to protect the monks from temptations and lead them (and those for whom they pray) to salvation required careful coordination of all aspects of the life of the monastery and submission of each to a common rhythm.(ill.1).

⁹ Agamben, G.: The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life, Publishing House of the Gaidar Institute; Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, St. Petersburg State University, 2020, p.41

If we compare this with the time of the art academy, where the study time is divided into semesters, there are a certain number of seminars, lectures that must be attended, essays, homework that must be written by a certain time, then we see how important the time axis is for the monastery and for the academy. At the academy, attending workshops, collecting credits, and owning artistic practice play an important role. There are special programs that can only be attended within certain years of study.¹⁰ There is time for the holidays. Time for exams. The student's book is needed in order to regulate this time and submit it to the exams for examination committee.

3. Getting into the rhythm

'The novelty of cenobitic monasticism was that it has literally taken the Pauline prescription of unceasing prayer (adialeiptōs proseuchesthe - 1. Thess. 5:17), with the help of the chanting of time, it turns all life into worship.'¹¹

'The project of cenobitic monasticism can be even more justifiably defined as the sanctification of life through time.'¹²

In the art academy, students/neophytes, enter into the rhythm, into the structure of time that the academy provides them, as well as the professor they have chosen. They learn to study and to follow a certain order. After that, having received a diploma, students can completely forget about this form of life, or vice versa, do not leave the academy, stay in it, continue to study further, improving, then, take the position of a teacher, thereby turning the rhythm of time in the academy into their own life.

¹⁰ The program for traveling within academic life between different universities bears the name of Erasmus of Rotterdam for a reason. This is another bridge between monastic life and academic succession. Most likely, Erasmus spent about 5 years in a monastery, then he remained a priest and then taught at the Universities.

¹¹ Agamben, G.: The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life, Publishing House of the Gaidar Institute; Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences, St. Petersburg State University, 2020, p.30

¹²Ibid, p.32

'On the one hand, everything becomes a rule and divine service to the point that life seems to have disappeared, and on the other hand, everything becomes life, and "lawful prescriptions" are transformed into "life prescriptions" in such a way that the law and the liturgy itself seem to be canceled'.¹³

4. About architecture

'The monastery, if this is possible, should be arranged in such a way that everything necessary, that is, water, a mill, a fish tank, a vegetable garden and various crafts, are inside the monastery, so that there is no need for monks to go outside the walls, which does not at all serve the benefit of souls,' - wrote Benedict of Nursia in his Rule.¹⁴ The monastery should be built as a closed and isolated space, allowing you to isolate yourself from the world and its temptations as much as possible.

A monastery is a closed world where dozens (hundreds) of men or women must go together to salvation. This is a sacred space and at the same time a complex economic mechanism with workshops, barns, and kitchens. In the case of cenobitic monasticism and early Christian monasteries, these are not so large buildings but also fenced off from the world and with tiny stone cells. Although there is an exception here, the monasteries of the mendicant orders (Franciscans and Dominicans) were usually built in the middle of the cities, without fencing off from anyone, so that the brothers went to preach. But if we compare the art academy with the monasteries of the Benedictine order, we will see many similarities. For example, if a monastery, thanks to the relics or miraculous images stored there, attracted a lot of pilgrims, it was necessary to equip the infrastructure there to receive them. For example, the famous work Adoration of the Lamb (Ghent Altarpiece), by Jan van Eyck in Saint Bavo's Abbey in Belgian city of Ghent (ill. 2) was shown only on special holidays. At the academy, such a "relic" is the Summer exhibition and the exhibition of Abschlussausstellung der Meisterschüler. This is the only time when anyone can come to the academy building. Under this event, special visual communication is organized in

¹³ Ibid, p.96

¹⁴ Monastic Rule of Benedict. Middle Ages in his monuments. Translated by N. A. Geinike, D. N. Egorov, V. S. Protopopov and I. I. Schitz. Edited by D.N. Egorov. M., 1913.

the form of markings, maps of premises, additional halls are opened, additional employees are invited, treats are prepared, etc.

A typical monastery of the 12th century was arranged from several buildings. The **church** corresponded to the ideal of severe asceticism, where geometry triumphed. Several entrances led into it, from the northern, southern and western sides, through which the laity could enter. The church can be compared to the main entrance to the academy from the Brühlische Terrasse. A quadrangular (rarely polygonal or even round) gallery, called the **claustrum**, adjoined the church from the south. The claustrum connected together the main monastic buildings. A garden was often laid out in the center of it. In the monastic tradition, the claustrum was likened to Eden surrounded by a wall, Noah's ark, where the family of the righteous was saved from the waters sent to sinners as punishment, Solomon's temple or Heavenly Jerusalem. If we enter from Brühlische Terrasse, then, we descend just down the stairs, as if into the claustrum, inside of which there is an amazing place with a fountain and a garden. There you can hide from the noisy main street. Solemn processions were also held in the claustrum, as in the academic garden there are sometimes meetings with the rector, this is the place where Meisterschüler comes out after the Summer exhibition, etc.

The administrative and disciplinary center of the monastery was located in the **Capitulum Hall**. In the same hall, the abbot instructed the brothers and sometimes consulted with selected monks. The administrative centers of the academy are located on the first and second floors, if we consider the main building of the academy on Brühlische Terrasse, and the Capitulum Hall resembles the class of some professor at the academy. Due to the fact that I am only making an approximate comparison, we will have as many Capitulum Halls in the academy as there are different Fachklasse of professors in the Bildende Kunst faculty, i.e. 13.

Next to the Capitulum Hall was the **library**. At the birth of monasticism, reading was a cure for a terrible disease - despondency. Many libraries had scriptoria, where the brothers copied and decorated new books. Until the 13th century, when workshops for lay scribes began to multiply in the cities, monasteries remained the main producers of books, and monks

their main readers. Many ancient texts have survived to this day only because they were preserved by medieval monks.

There were also a **refectory** and a **kitchen**, various outbuildings: mills, barns, cellars, and bakeries; stables, pigeon houses, etc. Medieval monks were engaged in many crafts (brewed beer, made wine, worked on glass, dressed leather, processed metals, produced tiles and bricks). Also in the art academy, there is a refectory and a kitchen, there are various cellars, and a large number of workshops. The special uniqueness of the Dresden Academy lies precisely in the various workshops, there is printing, a ceramic workshop, lithography, a photo studio, 3D printing, and much more.

5. Sociocultural role

Medieval monks actively developed natural resources: they mined stone, coal, iron and peat, uprooted and felled forests, developed salt mines, built water mills on rivers, etc. As we would say today, monasteries were one of the main centers of technical innovation. They were also centers of knowledge, a place where you could get information, the latest news, some monasteries carried the function of a museum that preserves artwork, for example, the Carthusian monastery of Chartreuse de Champmol *The Well of Moses* by Dutch artist Claus Sluter, 1340s in Haarlem – 1405 or 1406 in Dijon (ill. 3), the walls of many medieval cathedrals served as a book for parishioners – this is the Holy Scripture, carved in stone, and it could be read in different ways, plus the monasteries were the only “hotels” for itinerant noble guests, a place for the food of the poor, and, apparently, one of the most important places at certain times. As Johan Huizinga writes, ‘The art of government in the Middle Ages was not yet limited solely to bureaucracy and protocol. So in the XV century, when deciding state affairs, the princes, again and again, sought advice from frantic preachers, ascetics, and spiritualists. The element of religious tension is thus actively present in high politics.’¹⁵

As we approach the Dresden Academy, we can also read the building like a book: Fama stands on the dome, she is depicted

¹⁵ Huizinga, J.: *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, Ivan Limbakh Publishing House, St. Petersburg, 2011, p. 34

with wings, which ensure the rapid spread of the call, and with a trumpet with which she "trumpets" truth and falsehood. The Greek Pheme as a deity goes back to the theogony of Hesiod. Hesiod mentioned, that she was the daughter of Gaia. In ancient Roman poetry, Fama is an allegorical-symbolic figure and particularly embodies the uncontrollable rumor, the (preferably bad) reputation of a person. In modern times, the image of Pheme/Fama is used again primarily to represent fame. On the side facing the Elbe, the building bears the names of: Pheidias, Iktinos, Praxiteles, Polykleitos, Lysippos, Erwin von Steinbach, Lionnardo, Michelangelo, Raffael and Duerer and on the opposite side the saying: "TO THE FATHERLAND FOR DECOR AND HONOR".

The functions of the academy are extensive. It accepts students, educates a new generation of artists, transfers craft experience and knowledge, and also serves as a place of shelter for adult artists. One of the main functions of the academy is to create an opportunity for communication between society and the artist. The Academy, taking its origins from antiquity, reborn anew in the 16th-17th centuries, and then becoming a unique phenomenon in Germany after World War II, I would like to believe, it will retain its function in our time and it can be a cosmopolitan place and open to artists. This art institution is no less important for society than a religious institution. Although the threat of drowning in bureaucratic normalization and forgetting about their origins and meaning is equally great for both the art academy and the religious institution. This is another common link between them - constant thinking about their own meaning: how to exist now, how to modernize and how to follow the times.

6. Laughter and official culture

I haven't studied very much the comparison of the two systems: carnival and official, but it seems to me that the Medieval monastery and the art academy are also united by the coexistence of both comic and official culture. I accidentally came across a medieval Czech play (theatrical performance) "Pharmacist" of the XIV century. This is a detailed episode of the Easter pageant. 'The presence of jokes in it is associated with medieval urban culture, which tends to ridicule everything that lends itself to ridicule, as well as with

carnival culture, where laughter is part of the ritual.'¹⁶ The play itself consists of two layers: spiritual and comic. I was wondering where such a play could have been staged if theatrical space did not exist in the Middle Ages, or more precisely, it was floating, not static in one place. It is likely that the play could have been played within the walls of the church; the calendar year assumed feasts when an action unfolded within the church, which is difficult for a modern person to imagine there.

'The echoes of the market carnival laughter sounded within the walls of monasteries, universities and schools. Latin laughter literature of the Middle Ages found its completion at the highest stage of the Renaissance in Erasmus' Praise of Folly (this is one of the greatest offspring of carnival laughter in all world literature) and in the Letters of Obscure Men. No less rich and even more varied was the comic literature of the Middle Ages in vernacular languages. And here we will find phenomena similar to "Parodia sacra": parodic prayers, parodic sermons (the so-called "sermons joieux", i.e. "jolly sermons" in France), Christmas songs, parodic hagiographic legends, etc. Miracles and morality are carnivalized to a greater or lesser extent. Laughter has also penetrated into the mysteries: the diableries of the mysteries have a pronounced carnival character.'¹⁷

In the art academy in Germany, laughter and irony are not forbidden, one might even say they are encouraged. Students are open to the possibility of self-expression, in various materials and in different ways.¹⁸ The official culture in the academy can be called its bureaucratic structure, support of sponsors/state, accountability to them, administration of the whole study process, making a face and creating its role in society, etc.

¹⁶ Shovskaya, T.: Medieval Czech Play "Pharmacist", Journal Problems of the theatre, Moscow, 2015

¹⁷ Bakhtin, Mikhail: The creativity of Francois Rabelais and folk culture, Moscow, 1965, p. 10.

¹⁸ But even within the system of art academies, there are exceptions. For example, in the traditional St. Petersburg Academy of Arts named after Ilya Repin for any trick of an ironic nature, you can get a reprimand or even be expelled (depending on the degree of irony).

Conclusion

My attempts to somehow outwardly find a connection between the monastery and the academy are far-fetched. And, perhaps, in general, these six points are not so significant. They can be disputed. But there is one interesting point, which is actually the most important in the phenomenological consideration of these two institutions. There are two questions: "What is God?" and "what is art?", which remain relevant throughout time. It has not been and is not possible to give a clear answer to them once and for all, which means that such institutions trying to answer these questions will exist for as long as these questions are being asked. The concept of God, like the concept of art, could be compared to a form that always remains empty inside. A monastery, a religious institution, filling out this form, acts with its own capabilities and means, and the art academy with its own. But fundamentally, their focus on the problem is identical - the building some understandable discourse around penetrating emptiness. If in religion the cult is laid as a reliable foundation, interpreted and renewed again and again, then in the culture of academic art education, as in all art, there is a trace of a secularized cult as a fundamental genetic condition. Roughly speaking, such concepts as god and art are donut-shaped.

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Illustrations

ill. 1

February Calendar Page Presentation in the Temple, mid-1200s.
Unknown artistmaker.

©the J. Paul Getty Museum



ill. 2

Adoration of the Lamb (Ghent Altarpiece), Jan van Eyck in
Saint Bavo's Abbey in Belgian city of Ghent.

From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghent_Altarpiece



ill. 3

Carthusian monastery of Chartreuse de Champmol *The Well of Moses* by Dutch artist Claus Sluter. Fragment.

From https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Well_of_Moses



Why not the Academy?

by Marika Krasina & Anton Kryvulia (Rabota)

In this research, we are seeking the room to institutionalize autonomous, and unproductive art practices; to legalize the artist's invisible work outside of flat social functions: thus, looking out for a transient space for defending the place of art for the future.

genre: Meditation

tags: Academic Domain, Art, Artist, Art and Labour, Politics of Autonomy, Media-Asceticism, Whatever, Worldliness, Art-in-Itself

2022

To be with Art is all we ask.
Gilbert & George

Intent

Let us not pretend that at least some topic has remained relevant to us (artists in general), except the survival of art in conditions of the state of emergency, institutional commitments, and artist's insecurity.

Thanks to fate and our origin, we have long been living in the situation of alienation, deprivation, and uncertainty that many have faced now. During seven years of collaborative work, we had enough time to think, develop our own crisis strategy and formulate what we lack.

We are going to mark this utopia by employing our own practice, thus expanding the space of thinking on the mentioned issue.

Our practice

Free time

Art is not a public activity addressed to the market and the entertainment industry; not so much objects and stories for experiencing but the daily and invisible work of recreating, recollecting, and reinventing the world and the artist himself. This work is impossible without free time, and leisure, which the ancient Greeks called σχολή. Being the most fragile state of a human, it currently occurs as a victim of anxiety, poverty, and despair, leisure must be specially maintained. Even though such an unproductive understanding of the artist's work was already relevant for Plato, we have to introduce it as such again.

Our work is indistinguishable from our daily life. Our way of action means the refusal of production. We assume artistic work as a daily, constant will for creatively recollecting and re-creating the world and ourselves, such as daily unproductive work similar to the job of a taxi driver or window washer. If society captures the space of politics, turning art into an object of consumption, we, in response to this, enter the territory of labor and make an invisible, existing-in-itself artistic act the subject of social relation.¹

Witness

Johannes Cladders, the curator, noticed once: "I have always believed that it is the artist who creates a work, but a society that turns it into a work of art".

To turn such an unproductive practice into a condition of art and make the artist with his work-in-itself visible a witness is needed. It requires the observer's appearance, carrying out the practice of materialization, in which a hidden and aimless process renders into the matter. As a result of such materialization, the artist's

¹ "This destructive, devouring aspect of the laboring activity, to be sure, is visible only from the standpoint of the world..." Hannah Arendt. Human Condition. §13.

unproductive practice acquires material qualities, which at a specific moment can be installed, stored, and transmitted.

Like the [Labridae fish](#), which can change sex in extreme circumstances, we had set up such outer observers from ourselves. This alien, curatorial mode of action allows combining synthetically unproductive practices with materialization, communication, and presentation. The material achieved resulted from the fixation of such unproductive artwork: documentary video and photography, audio recordings, notebooks, index of things, maps, and the things themselves act as a source for materialization and re-materialization of artwork without direct production.

Artistic practice, engaged in the constant recollection of its origins, and curatorial practice following the unproductive artistic process and materializing it, together constitute our work.

Output

A brief path of migration and significant topics of interest:

2014	Venice, It / Nepal	Field recordings, developing the main concept, Himalayan drift
2015	Karnataka, In / Lviv, Ua / Montenegro / Serbia / Dresden, De / Paris, Fr / Catalonia / Minsk, By / Moscow, Ru	Common things as a medium, field studies
2016	Armenia / Georgia / Istanbul, Tu / Budapest, Hu / Crimea, Ua / Moscow, Ru / Milano, It / Vienna, At	Caucasus drift, phenomenological studies, White Mold painting theory, meta-collage
2017	Sri Lanka / Karlsruhe, De / Catalonia / France / Karlsruhe, De	Bubble book, Media Ecology theory, Media studies
2018	Porto, Pt / Andorra / Karlsruhe, De / Turkey / Greece / Mannheim, De / Novgorod, Ru / Rome, Napoli, Cicily, It / Vietnam / Laos	Interventions in ZKM museum, Media Theory, Nonknowledge drift, path to Mannheim, Ancient Russian architectural studies, Roman studies, Indochina drift
2019	Thailand / South Korea / Moscow, Ru / Helsinki, Fi / Kuban, Ru / Thessaloniki, Gr / Toscana, Venice, It	Aesthetics of Nonknowledge, art theory, Politics of Nonknowledge
2020	Mänttä, Fi / Durykino, Ru / Novy Svit, Ua	Managing our archive, scanning notepads, transcripts from dictaphone, Art and Labour theory, Corona and biopolitics
2021	Moscow, Ru / Cesis, Lv / Děčín, Cz	MUSEUM, struggle, Academy research

Work examples



[Annual Report](#)

Magazine, 2014-now

Since 2014 Rabota has been publishing the annual report with verbatim and photo documentation of our nomadic artistic practice.



[Common Body](#)

Index installation, 2015

A scroll of our private possessions was compiled on June 21, 2015, in the Dresden office where we used to live at that time. The list was exhibited in Moscow in February 2016.



[Apocalypse Surfers](#)

Generative Video, 2014-now

In common life, all people on earth eat, drink, sleep, produce carbon dioxide and shoot short videos. We do the same. We drop such short videos, shot by us on a smartphone, to the archive. From that array, we render an endless random video stream. This stream can never be repeated, each time it presents a new version of the picture of our life.

Lack

Common

Contemporary art necessarily implies a principle of globality, in a sense the *Mondialite* by Édouard Glissant. In the current circumstances, this principle is fatally vulnerable, it seems, due to its ephemerality. Are the institutional systems of contemporary art global? Are artistic practices and strategies of artists global? Intentionally yes, but actually — not.

The significance of the current crisis is that this ephemerality has become a painful signal for change, even though each institution individually can return to its original state and work as before. *Globality as a condition of contemporary art requires more reliable institutional procuring.*

Space and Time

The lockdown and the distancing, as expected, ignited the theme of “digital art” and “art in the digital space” as an obvious and convenient way out of the crisis. The temptations to rush with all artistic practice, to transfer formal and instrumental efforts into this sphere can only be overcome by an attentive phenomenological analysis of the digital world as a medium. Without this media grasp, artistic action is in doubt. This analysis pretty quickly gives us a conclusion.

Pavel Alexandrovich Florensky, a Russian art theorist, noticed that art requires the unity of both time and space for the artwork and the spectator. The digital world cannot be a substitute for this common, it is not Space and not Time, it is only a means of communication, it is not a “world” at all.

Utopia

This is a manifestation of need, in the form of a topology of this shortage. The topology is drawn up by phantom pain. It indicates an

object of lack — *Institution as the social framework providing artist's autonomous practice by its structure and instruments, employing digital networks, innovative communication means, and contemporary curatorial practices coordinated and replicated in the global field in real-time and real space.*

Consideration of post-crisis changes and possible actions in the new conditions requires multilateral expertise and broad explication. Such work is probably being carried out everywhere, but it is far from complete. Now we can use only the results of our observations and build on them our utopia with risk without which there is neither future nor art².

² "In the work of art man risks losing not simply a piece of cultural wealth, however precious, and not even the privileged expression of his creative energy: it is the very space of his world, in which and only in which he can find himself as man and as being capable of action and knowledge." Giorgio Agamben. THE MAN WITHOUT CONTENT

Academy

The Academy turns out to be one of the few institutions capable of resisting bad weather, wind changes, icing, and warming. If the policy of any museum can sooner or later be declared irrelevant, or questioned, then the Academy, due to the fluidity of its content (after all, it is always just an empty frame) remains invulnerable even during an incredibly severe drought. The Academy is a network institution with a sustained history of more than two thousand years. To look into its emptiness means almost stopping time.

Precisely because the object of this empty frame could be whatever, the academy can be a condition for autonomous artistic practice, independent neither from collectors of things nor from funds of political parties. In addition, being a place, the academy gives people the unique opportunity to attend to the living work of the artist³. The Academy is not so much a pedagogical institution but a place where the artist meets society.

If we consider the Academy from the perspective of our institutional utopia its mission would be in defending the autonomy of artistic practices and procuring such a social function as a place to witness the emergence of art.

World, real (not virtual), network institution that provides the social framework for artist's autonomous practice by its structure and instruments: **why not the Academy?**

³ There was an attempt to implement this function in the Art-residency format, but it is definitely far from being able to replace the academy.

Rabota
Why not the Academy?

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2022